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## Hobo Advice Trainhopping: Why NOT Trainhopping?

(self.vagabond)

submitted 3 months ago \* by [huckstah](#) [Trainhopper / Hitchhiker](#)

Just like anything in life, trainhopping comes with both its pro's and its con's. As a trainhopper myself, I must admit there are arguably more con's to trainhopping as opposed to pro's. Yet then again, that all depends on who you are, and the particular situation that you are in.

If you have read [Trainhopping: Why Trainhopping](#), then you are already familiar with the reasons why trainhopping has its benefits over other forms of travel. In this article, I'll go over some of the con's of trainhopping and why it's not always the best choice of traveling.

- **It's EXTREMELY dangerous.**

This should be obvious to anyone that's ever fathomed the idea of hopping on a moving piece of metal that weighs 200 tons. There

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are countless ways to lose a limb, or worse, lose your life. And after you've jumped on and you've found a safe place to sit, you're still not completely safe.

When trains often slow down or speed up, the long line of cars produce "slack". When that slack finally tightens in either direction (forward or backwards), it creates a violent jerk, and you better hold on tight or it can easily send you flying off the train without any warning whatsoever. Anytime you stand up to piss, stretch, walk around, or take a picture, ALWAYS have one hand on a rail, or preferably both.

Not only is slack a problem to constantly think about, but what about if you're on a loaded car and the load suddenly shifts without warning? There have been dozens of trainhoppers killed in the past because they were squished between a stack of lumber or a load of steel pipes. This is why it's important to always try riding empty cars! Yet then again, in the unpredictable world of trainhopping, beggars cant always be choosers, and you sometimes have to hop anything readily and quickly available.

Keep in mind that trainhopping doesn't have to be anymore dangerous than anything else in life. Nine times out of ten, most deaths are because the person hopping the train was drunk, high, or just completely stupid. Like anything else in life, if you act like a fool, bad things will happen. Myself, and many others, have been trainhopping for many years, and nothing terrible has ever happened to us.

- **It's ILLEGAL!**

This should also be rather obvious to everyone. Hopping freight

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trains is a federal crime, and you can get arrested for doing so. Although when you usually get caught, the workers will just ignore you or tell you to leave the yard, occasionally you will get caught by the bull (security guard), and they are not known for letting people go with just a warning. They will be quick to write you a ticket for "no trespassing", and kick you out of the yard. Even worse, in some towns, the local cops will arrest you and put you in jail for several days. It's VERY rare that you will actually get arrested for hopping trains, but there are a few towns that take it quite seriously.

- **Bad Apples!**

The trainhopping subculture is unique to other traveling subcultures because there are several different types of riders. You have hobo's that ride to find work, and you have crustykids (dirtykids) that do it as a form of freedom and rebellion. You also have hitchhikers and backpackers that sometimes ride the trains for various reasons, and then you also have violent gangs of criminals that have been known to rob and/or kill anyone they find on the rails. You have some people that are doing it for thrill and adventure, and you have some people doing it because they are "laying low" and running away from felonies or horrible backgrounds.

After years of riding the rails across the USA, I have to admit that in the past decade we have had a growing amount of bad apples, which is a complete reversal years past.

There have been a lot of past murders on the rails, along with a huge rise in meth and heroin addicts.

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It's possible to get robbed or even killed if you find yourself hanging out at the wrong hobo jungle (camp), or jumping on a train with the wrong person. Although this is rare, it's always good to carry some form of protection and be weary of your surroundings.

- **It's DIRTY!**

If you think hitchhiking down dusty roads is dirty, you're in for even worse when it comes to hopping freight trains.

Freight trains carry everything from dirt to coal, and years worth of residue eventually builds up on every square inch of the car, and it will quickly stain you from head to toe. Just spending a mere 24 hours on a freight train will make your clothes look as if you had just finished working in a dirt/coal mine. Also, that's not even including all the oil and grease that is often coated on every square inch of the floor and railings. Many trainhoppers wear black clothing specifically because of the amount of dirt and grunge that stains everything, because any other color of clothing will be instantly and permanently ruined.

- **Getting LOST!**

No matter how long you've been riding the rails, and no matter how expert you are at reading trains and train yards, there is never any 100% certainty in knowing where that train is going to go, and where it will finally stop. Your first year of trainhopping involves a learning curve that comes with a lot of mistakes, and the most common mistake you will make is taking a train that goes the wrong way, or simply doesn't stop at the destination you were wanting it to stop at. Most of these simple errors are often

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overcome after a few months of experience, and this will become far less of a problem. But even after my 10 years of hopping freight, I'm not perfect, and don't believe ANYONE that tells you they are.

- **This is NOT a Form of Vacation, Adventure, or Sport. This is an Illegal and Dangerous Lifestyle!**

There are some people that see a picture or read a blog about trainhopping, and they get immediate wanderlust. They start wondering if it's something they should try to learn over a weekend, or during a short break from work or college.

If this describes you, PLEASE DO NOT HOP FREIGHT TRAINS.

Trainhopping is a lifestyle preserved for houseless travelers that choose not to use other forms of transportation for various reasons, mostly lack of income.

This is NOT a lifestyle to start learning if you have never lived on the road before. Most trainhoppers were hitchhikers and backpackers for several months, even years, before they started learning to hop freight trains. If you have no experience hitchhiking or roughing it on the road, you are NOT ready to start hopping freight trains.

Jumping on to a freight train without any real-life experience from other trainhoppers is going to get you killed, maimed, injured, or arrested, 99% of the time.

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[ - ] **CXR1037** 12 points 3 months ago

Nice list! My only thoughts:

1) *It's EXTREMELY dangerous.*

Indeed, but I think this should be prefaced with a note: most deaths or injuries occur either while under the influence of drugs/alcohol/both or hanging out with bad crews (ie don't catch out with the guy who just got out of prison, or the girl who just ran out of psych meds, or both).

2) It's ILLEGAL!

Bulls aren't security guards -- they're federal agents with jurisdiction anywhere there's tracks. Additionally, I wouldn't quite say it's very rare to get thrown in jail. Some towns are zero tolerance on the matter, but other times how you carry yourself will play a major role. Do you have "Fuck Cops" tattooed on your knuckles? Do you call the bull a "fat pig"? Enjoy jail.

3) *Bad Apples!*

I think you overestimate the level of "bad" out there. There are certainly a number of trashy oogles out there, but they likely won't do more than steal your shit. As far as violent crime, there are indeed real life criminals on the rails but how many people have been taken out by train riders in the past ten years? The only recent headline was John Alpert up in Roseville.

4) *It's DIRTY!*

Damn straight!

5) *Getting LOST!*

Not all of us get lost. Some of us know exactly when we're getting to our destination. But that's pro-level-train riding.

:D

[permalink](#)



[ - ] **huckstah** **Trainhopper / Hitchhiker** **S** 4 points 3 months ago\*

I agree with all of these edits and I will change the article accordingly.



However, I have to disagree with suggesting not all of us get lost. Perhaps lost was too strong of a word, but sometimes a train will drop off cars or breakup in a location is simply impossible to predict. Although I'm 99% accurate on my trains, there's always that 1% that will occasionally catch you off-guard.

Thanks for the suggesstions! You definitely know wtf youre talking about. Would love to see more comments and posts from you on this subreddit!

Stay safe brother.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **CXR1037** 2 points 3 months ago

I remember you from...STP? I think you were on there. Maybe even on [my site](#)?

Anyway yeah, setouts do occur. Knowing the train your on goes a long way to preventing that (for instance, don't catch a gondola on the RV to Oakland train :( haha).

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **epicitous1** 4 points 3 months ago

oh cool its cxr. you were the best poster on stp until you got banned for whatever reason.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **CXR1037** 2 points 3 months ago

Haha thanks.

I just found out about this sub!

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **huckstah** **Trainhopper / Hitchhiker** **S** 4 points 3 months ago\*

Ah yes, I lurk both of them. Always enjoyed your posts on STP as you were generally more knowledgeable and literate than many of the oogles and crusties that lurk there. Good to see your contributions here. Id definitely love to see a few of your pictures and stories posted here for others to learn from, as I'm sure you have a shit ton of info to share with travelers new and old.

Edit: Speaking of Oak/RV, I hopped out of Emoryville on an IM hotshot that I was HOPING would stop in Roseville so I could switch trains to Eugene. Instead, the train did a crew change at some middle-of-

nowhere crossing, and then shot straight through Roseville and switched tracks to Ogden, Utah. That definitely wasn't in my immediate plans.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **epicitous1** 2 points 3 months ago

i want to hear about your close calls!

[permalink](#)



[–] **OkBench** 2 points 3 months ago

First off, mad respect for what you do man. Wish i was at a spot in life I could experience this first hand. I definitely have a call to do it, just couldnt make it happen right now. Just a thought, have you ever considered making videos of your travels, or maybe a video blog documenting your travels? Your a great writer and I'd imagine you would have a good following of people interested in the videos. I recently followed you on IG to try and keep up some. Im an avid bencher and interested in all things rails. Keep up the good work and maybe ill catch up with ya one day.

[permalink](#)



[–] **huckstah** **Trainhopper / Hitchhiker** **S** 2 points 2 months ago

Nah never really considered a travel blog. I have this subreddit and an instagram, but that's about it. I wish I knew how to make a few bucks writing travel articles online or something, but I don't know alot about that industry.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **cyanogen\_chloride** 2 points 2 months ago

Just so happens, I have some experience with blogs and monetizing them. Hell, if you're serious about it, I will even buy a custom domain name for it. You won't necessarily get rich. But for a frugal person such as yourself....it could make your travels much easier.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **ElwayThrow** 2 points 2 months ago

Chiming in here, I could do a few hours of actual programming if needed.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **cyanogen\_chloride** 2 points 1 month ago

Word, what do you code in? I think it would be best to use a cms such as wordpress or blogger to

Are you a developer? Try out the [HTML to PDF API](#)



keep things easy and fast on his end.

Where ya at </u/huckstah> ?

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[ - ] [huckstah](#) [Trainhopper / Hitchhiker](#) [S](#) 2 points 1 month ago

I'm on the border of Alabama/Mississippi right now. I'm totally down for this idea.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[ - ] [cyanogen\\_chloride](#) 1 point 1 month ago

Nice, let's try to establish a time to do a phone call on this in the next week or so. If you are comfortable with that. I'll handle the heavy lifting, you will simply supply content. There are many apps for your iPhone that will interface with the CMS directly, makes posting simple as pie (photos, text, video, whatever). You ever pass through KY?

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[ - ] [ElwayThrow](#) 1 point 1 month ago

Yep I'll work with whatever you think is best, I don't want to take on any new responsibility. PHP/etc are my top ones. I can work with pretty much anything. Server stuff and client side too, JS/CSS/etc. You can just set up what you need and then let me know when you want something customized or fixed. WordPress or Blogger would be great.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[ - ] [OkBench](#) 1 point 2 months ago

I feel ya man. I recently watched "Freeload" and have seen a few others covering some of the same content. Just thought it might be something to think about. I'm new to reddit and dont know my way around much so im sure your posting on here a lot more than I maybe seeing. Ill keep an eye out for more content. Stay safe brother.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[ - ] [King\\_DickWeed](#) 1 point 2 months ago

If you dont mind me asking, whats your instagram name? id love to follow you

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[-] [huckstah](#) [Trainhopper / Hitchhiker](#) [S](#) 4 points 2 months ago

@hobo\_huck

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[-] [King\\_DickWeed](#) 1 point 2 months ago

awesome dude, thanks!

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